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# Interviews

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The interview process can vary from company to company, but there are several ways you can prepare to ensure that you give every opportunity your best effort. These preparation methods hold true regardless of the level of position you are seeking or your quest for a leadership role, acceptance into a select group, scholarship, or admittance to graduate or professional school.

## Things to Consider

### *Understand Your Audience*

» Every interview process seeks to better understand candidates' fit for the opportunity they are trying to fill. It is a competitive process, so you must come prepared to articulate your academic background, life, and work experiences that have prepared you for the role. Consider not only why you are qualified, but what makes you a unique candidate to match the qualifications outlined for the opportunity.

### *Do Your Research*

» Each company, program, or group conducting interviews has a distinct purpose. The more you can understand about that opportunity in terms of the organization's goals, expectations, and vision, the easier it will be to relay information about you and your background to the interviewer. Look at the organization's website, network with current or former employees of the organization, and identify recent events that demonstrate vision as well as successes or failures. This information not only helps you target your conversations, it also helps you understand the organization's values as well as opportunities you may have to advance and grow beyond the original position you are seeking.

### *Prepare to Make a Solid First Impression*

» Each interview may introduce you to new contacts within the organization, so it is important to show that you value the opportunity. Looking your best beginning with great personal hygiene, appropriate attire for the occasion and industry, and wearing your biggest smile will show that you are enthusiastic and ready to learn more about the opportunity. Going into an interview prepared speaks volumes and will help you will drastically shape your confidence and ability to sell your experiences for the opportunity before you.

### *Understand Your Worth*

» If you received an interview, please recognize that your experience is valued, and that you meet the minimum qualifications for consideration. Take confidence in knowing that the interviewer wants to hear more about you and understand how your background and experience can add value to their team. They are also rooting for your success! In final preparation for an upcoming interview make sure to read through these quick tips.

## Things to Consider (continued)

### Practice

Anything worth achieving requires preparation and practice - interviews are no exception! You may not know exactly which questions to expect, but there are hundreds of sample questions available online. Also the Career Services staff, available in OSU Career Services and the college career offices, are here to help you prepare through mock interviews. Web based interview software also provides an avenue for you to see first-hand a diversity of interview questions and how comfortable you are at thinking quickly on your feet. Make an appointment with a Career Consultant and practice online through [Interview Stream](#).

In each practice method, make sure you frame answers from a variety of your educational and life experiences by using the S-T-A-R technique to make sure you fully answer the question and show the value of the experience.

**S** – Situation  
**T** – Task  
**A** – Action  
**R** – Result

The **STAR** technique provides a framework for your stories and shows a prospective employer or selection committee how you have handled different situations in the past as a predictor of how you may handle experiences in the future.

- What was the situation you were facing?
- What task were you given?
- How did you act or respond in the respective situation or to the task you were given?
- What was the result, or outcome, of the experience?
  - » *Hint:* Everyone loves happy endings that make you feel warm and fuzzy, but you can still show that you are able to overcome adversity with what you learned or took away from a challenging experience!

## Interview Supplies

Presenting a professional impression to potential employers is always important. Career Services offers the following to help you put your best foot forward:

- Free resume paper (up to 10 sheets) in natural white, whitestone, or millstone.
- Free thank you cards - we encourage students to send a note or letter after each interview.
- \$5.00 Portfolios - store your additional resumes, letters of reference, etc.
- \$5.00 Business Cards - must be purchased at least two weeks in advance of use by filling out the online order form under [Job Search Supplies](#) on [HireOSUGrads.com](#).

All items can be picked up at the Career Services office (360 Student Union). Resume paper and thank you cards can also be found at the Career Services offices in your academic college.

## Quick Tips To Do...

### Before the Interview

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- Read the job description thoroughly.
- Look closely at the organization's website and current events.
- Study your resume and think critically about the academic and career experiences you have had that may show prior training or demonstrate your ability to excel in the role.
- Understand the value of your degree and research average starting salaries appropriate for your program and experience level to determine a competitive range.
- Purchase, or gain access, to a suit or other professional interview attire appropriate for the industry.
- Practice your responses to interview questions out loud to Career Services staff or a trusted confidante who can offer constructive feedback.
- Identify 3-5 questions you have about the opportunity or position to show interest.
- Practice using your technology and ensure a professional, or neutral background, as well as good lighting and sound.

### During the Interview

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- Demonstrate strong non-verbal behaviors including smiling, direct eye contact, and good posture.
- Minimize distracting behaviors such as fidgeting or overuse of filler words like "um, like, and you know."
- Fully articulate your responses to behavioral questions seeking examples using the S-T-A-R technique.
- Vary the source of your stories or examples when responding to questions by highlighting experiences from previous positions, academic projects, campus or community involvement, leadership roles, or unique life experiences.
- Recognize that interviewing is a two-way street and offers you a chance to learn more about the opportunity by asking your prepared questions at the conclusion of the interview or when prompted.
- Avoid questions pertaining to salary or benefits unless brought up by the interviewer.
- Ask about next steps in the interview or selection process for clarity of timelines and how to move forward with other companies, if applicable.

### After the Interview

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- Send a thank you note or email within 24-48 hours of the interview experience recapping your gratitude, what you learned, or how you could make a meaningful contribution to their team.
- Respect any timelines given by employers before following up to see where they are in the decision process, unless there is an update to your job search status such as receipt of another job offer with a pending deadline.

# Different Types of Interviews

Interview formats vary including in person, virtual, or by telephone depending on the circumstances or preference of the organization interviewing. You can be successful in any format if you are mindful of some of the nuances unique to each interview setting.

## In-Person Interviews

In person interviews can pair you with an interviewer or multiple interviewers. It is especially common as you advance beyond a first-round interview that you will have more extended interviews where you are able to meet several people that have a vested interest in a new hire or team member.

Going to an interview professionally dressed and with items requested by the company (if applicable), several copies of your resume or CV, a list of references, or even an academic transcript in a professional portfolio or folder can show advanced preparation and give you the ability to adjust given different circumstances. Arrive 10-15 minutes early, turn off your cell phone, get some water, take a restroom break, and look in the mirror one last time to go into the interview as confident as possible.

## Virtual Interviews

Virtual Interviews are very similar to in person interviews in many ways. You still have the advantage of seeing your interviewer and being able to observe non-verbal behaviors, such as whether the interviewer is taking notes. Additionally, you can have your resume in front of you, as well as a few notes and the questions you prepared to ask the interviewer.

Look carefully at details shared during the application process, as well as other correspondence you receive from Career Services or the organization itself, as technology platforms to 'host' the interview can vary. Practice your virtual interview skills, looking into the camera to simulate eye contact and pay careful attention to backgrounds and other distracting noises that could take away from the interviewer's ability to hear you.

## Phone Interviews

Phone interviews are perhaps the trickiest interview style because there can be so much going on behind the scenes. So much of human communication is built around non-verbal behaviors from smiling, to eye contact, to looking for cues as to what comes next.

Phone interviews require candidates to work hard to engage and manage a smooth conversation. For this reason, it is important to slow down, enunciate your answers, remember to smile, and project your voice through a more assertive tone to show confidence. It is also key to identify next steps and obtain contact information when you engage in this form of interview to make future dialogue possible.

# Sample Interview Questions

## 1. Tell Me About Yourself.

Assume you will be asked this position and prepare your response ahead of time to set a positive tone for the interview. Research the organization and position to identify how you can make a valuable contribution. Prepare up to a two-minute response encompassing your academic background and why you are a strong candidate for the position by talking over key experiences, qualifications, and accomplishments rather than personal information from your childhood or family. You may include reasons why you developed a passion for your field, your interest in the position, or even your long-range professional goals. "My background has been devoted to preparing myself to become the best professional possible. For example, ..."

## 2. Why are you interested in this position?

Talk about your motivation for applying for the position and why this company stood out to you. Discuss how the skills you have that relate to the criteria requested in the position. Reflect on what distinguishes this employer from competitors in the same industry and why it appeals to you personally. Research the company's website and the company's mission statement and core values; this information will help you develop insightful comments: "Through my internship experience, I discovered just how much I love this profession. That is when I started researching employers. After reading your core values and mission, I knew there was alignment between my core values and the vision of the company. That's why I believe this is an organization I would thrive in and enjoy building my career."

## 3. What qualifications do you have?

For greatest impact, identify skills you have gained pertinent to your success in the position. Name a specific skill, provide a brief example demonstrating that skill, and then move on to identifying the next qualifier. To introduce training received through your education or experience, mention specific courses or positions that were especially beneficial to your skill development. Explain how these skills and experiences tie to the position or give you a solid foundation for the position.

## 4. What are your strengths?

List two to three strengths that would contribute to your success in the position or value you could add to the team. Provide specific examples of these strengths in your life. For example, "My co-workers have always sought me out to ask advice in sticky situations with difficult people. They say that I know how to work with all kinds of people, which means a lot to me. As a result, I would say that my biggest strengths are adaptability and strong interpersonal communication skills."

## 5. What are your weaknesses?

There are a variety of ways to handle this question, so think carefully about your response to this question. One approach says to name a quality that could be viewed as both a positive and negative trait, however, this response tends to be overused and send the wrong message. Instead you might name a personal challenge which you have overcome. Another approach would be to name a characteristic not essential to your success in the job. Remember, however, that each weakness should be followed with actions you are taking to overcome the weakness to remove any doubt an employer has about your ability to perform.

# Sample Interview Questions (continued)

## 6. Did you ever have a difficult working relationship?

Be wise in answering a question of this nature. You do not want to give the impression of being either a troublemaker or someone who avoids conflicts at all cost. Neither is valuable to an organization. Employers know that conflict is a fact of life. In fact, employers value people with the skills necessary to get through difficult situations. "Yes, my boss asked me to do something that did not appear totally ethical. I asked to speak with him after work when we could have a private conversation about the matter. Through that discussion, I was able to share my personal dilemma about the situation. Thankfully, he had not realized all the implications this issue could create and quickly made appropriate adjustments. We were both very pleased with the outcome because I was able to stay true to my values, and we developed an even more productive working relationship."

## 7. What kinds of people rub you the wrong way?

Be careful how you respond to such a personal question. For example, "People who claim they are going to do something and do not follow through." While you may want to share this information with the interviewer, you need to keep the conversation positive and include how you deal positively with these types of people to encourage them to be productive members of your project or team.

## 8. Which course did you find most difficult and why?

The interviewer wants to know if you have perseverance to face difficulty when learning something new. For instance, "After earning a 'D' in Organic Chemistry my first semester, I was devastated. Fortunately, that experience revealed my poor study skills from high school, which led me to hire a tutor. After taking the course again, I was able to bring my grade up to a 'B'. The change in my study habits have dramatically improved my overall academic achievement shown by my consistent GPA of a 3.25 or better over the last 3 semesters."

## 9. What is one of your greatest failures? What did you learn from it?

No one is immune to failure. Being able to admit that you have fallen short of your goals shows humility and maturity. However, avoid examples that might reflect your ability to do the job. Choose an example that can show you dealt with the failure and what you learned from the experience that will help you in the future. Plus, focusing on what you learned or how you grew because of the adversity will help you end on a positive note that shows resilience.

## 10. Do you work best in a team environment or working independently?

Think about your response to this question considering the requirements of the position while staying true to your nature. For instance, "Although I have thoroughly enjoyed group projects and teamwork, the hours required to work independently to solve complex problems is equally satisfying to me."



# Sample Interview Questions (continued)

## 11. Would you rather oversee a project or work as part of a team?

It is important to realize that different situations call for different sets of skills. Therefore, it is important to demonstrate to the interviewer that you know when to lead and when to follow. For example, "There are times that I have found myself in both roles. I am happy to follow the leadership of someone else when they have greater expertise than I do in a certain area. In fact, some of the best learning experiences I have had have come through being a contributing team member. However, it has been very encouraging in the past when the group decided that I would be the best person to lead the project. I am honestly very happy in either role."

- "An example of a time I stepped up to lead would be ..."
- "An example of a time that I enjoyed following was ..."

## 12. What are your short-term and long-term career goals?

Spend quality time reflecting on this question prior to the interview. Have several professional goals in mind. You may want to research a typical career path for a person that is successful with this employer. Tell the manager you plan to be working for him or her in that position. "Although it is certainly difficult to predict things that far into the future, I know what direction I want my career path to follow. Within the next five years, I would like to become the best \_\_\_\_\_ your company has. I will work hard to becoming the expert that others rely on. And, in doing so, I feel I will be fully prepared to take on any greater responsibilities that might be presented in the long term."

## 13. Tell me about a time when \_\_\_\_\_. Share an example of when \_\_\_\_\_.

- You solved a complex problem
- You worked on a diverse team
- You led others to achieve a goal
- Your integrity was challenged
- You exceeded expectations
- You failed to meet expectations
- You had a difficult customer service experience

Behavioral interview questions typically ask for examples or stories that demonstrate an experience that touches on skills or qualities important to your success in the job. By hearing how you have handled situations in the past, an employer can understand how you are likely to handle future situations. Remember to use the S-T-A-R outline to share the full story from the situation you were in, task you were given, action you took, and the result. Make sure your stories are from diverse areas of your life – work experiences, life experiences, academic projects, leadership, or service. Sharing from multiple areas of your life will allow an interviewer to get to know you and see depth in a short window of time.

## 14. What motivates you?

This is truly a get to know you question to see your intrinsic or extrinsic motivators as well as for them to understand how those factors may fit into the position you are seeking.

# Sample Interview Questions (continued)

## 15. Why should we hire you?

This question is almost a bookend to the “Tell Me About Yourself” question at the beginning of an interview, giving you a platform to recap your most important selling points for the position. These could include your key qualifications, interest in the position, value you could bring to your team, and enthusiasm for the company. However, think of this as reinforcement of the themes you want the interviewer to walk away with, not a repeat of what you shared in your opening response!

## 16. Do you have any questions?

Always be prepared with 3-5 solid questions that you can ask the interviewer. Candidates often overlook this opportunity, leaving them with a missed opportunity to sell themselves! By asking questions at the conclusion of an interview you show interest in learning more about the position and the company, as well as demonstrate that you are thinking carefully about your future. Clarifying expectations, requirements of the position, and nature of the work can help you differentiate between opportunities with multiple companies and make the decision of where to commit much easier.

### Sample Questions:

- What qualities would the ideal candidate for this position possess?
- How does this position interact with the rest of the organization?
- What do you enjoy most about working for this firm?
- What challenges might I face in this position?
- What education and training programs does the company provide?
- How did you get started in the company? What made you successful?
- How does this job contribute to the mission or goals of the company?
- What makes this firm different from your competitors?



# Common Interview Themes

Prepare examples or stories for each of the common interview themes below. Once you have a good example, it will be easier to manipulate that story to fit the specific questions asked during the interview. Don't forget to use the STAR method when preparing your examples and make sure you share the result or lesson learned from each experience!

## S - Situation | T - Task | A - Action | R - Result

Your strengths:

Your biggest mistake or failure:

Time you worked in a team to accomplish something together:

Example of when you took initiative:

Time you had a disagreement with your supervisor or group member:

Example of when you made an unpopular decision or showcased integrity: